No. 18

THE HEROINES SHOWCASE

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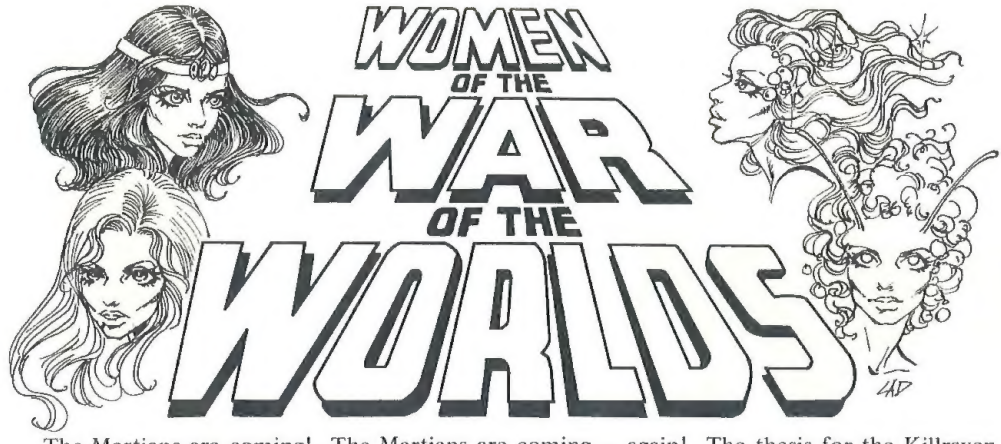

The Martians are coming! The Martians are coming – again! The thesis for the Killraven /War of the Worlds stories in *Amazing Adventures* #18-39, and *Marvel Team-Up* #45, is that H. G. Wells' War of the Worlds occurred. Defeated by earthly bacteria during the initial invasion, the Martians returned one hundred years later, in 2001. Immune to natural and laboratory bred diseases, and able to defeat earth's mightiest armies, they won this time. The ravaged earth suffered more from the after effects of its own weapons than it did, directly, from the Martians.

Killraven, orphaned during the invasion, is raised by a renegade scientist working for the Martians, but is taken from him by the Martians and placed in their gladiatorial school. He escapes from the gladiators' prison along with two friends, M'Shulla and Old Skull. Hawk joins them to form the band known as the Freemen. The goal of Killraven and his Freemen is to destroy the Martians on earth and free humanity. During his travels while attempting those feats, he meets with, and is influenced by, four remarkable women.

The first of the four women is introduced in *AA* #21, the first story to be scripted by Don McGregor, the author who put his own unique stamp on Killraven/War of the Worlds. **CARMILLA FROST** appears as a sarcastic molecular biologist working for the Martians. Using Grok, a "clonal man," she frees M'Shulla and the Freemen who, in turn, rescue Killraven from his gladiatorial mentor, Warloard. She and Grok flee with the Freemen.

Three of the themes that bind Carmilla, Killraven, M'Shulla and Grok are first presented in *AA* #22 when the Freemen reach Washington, D.C. Killraven expresses his doubts about Carmilla and his dislike of her sarcastic accusations that he is "ignorant and shortsighted" by stating that he is self-educated under difficult circumstances and then questioning her motives for leaving an apparently easy life with the Martians. Grok reacts with hostility toward any threat to Carmilla but is quieted by her. Later that night Carmilla and M'Shulla talk. Carmilla expresses regret that the Martians left her no room for the "softer" emotions. She also mentions that her father was a "keeper," a scientist working for the Martians. In *AA* #23 Carmilla saves M'Shulla, then expresses surprise at sentiment in the midst of battle when M'Shulla thanks her. *AA* #24 shows two glimpses of her lost softness when she shrieks for Grok to remove a vampire bat from her throat and when she declares a New Year's Eve party in the White House catacombs. During the party she tells M'Shulla that her father was killed by the Martians and that she was locked in the room with his corpse.

In *AA* #25 Carmilla again takes up Killraven's lack of foresight, accusing him of subverting his long range goals for immediate vengeance. Killraven reiterates his doubts about Carmilla and her soft life with the Martians. This argument leads to violence between Killraven and – M'Shulla! M'Shulla offers to leave the freemen with Carmilla if Killraven wants that. Here the fourth theme binding the quartet centered around Carmilla Frost is made clear: Killraven fears losing his "mud brother" to this strange woman with her strange thoughts.

(In this issue Carmilla changes from boots, bikini bottom, knit half-top and sword, to red bikini, thigh boots, and pistol. She maintains this costume, with minor variations, throughout

the rest of the story despite February cold on Lake Michigan, October rains in Tennessee, and the heat and humidity of the Okeefenokee Swamp.)

AA #26 gives Carmilla time only for a bit of cheesecake, and to tell Grok of her desire to say his real name before defeating two inept attackers. However, in *AA* #27 she shows hysterical protectiveness for him by attacking with her bare hands a giant lamprey that is draining his blood. When Hawk, at Killraven's direction, plucks her off the lamprey, she recovers enough self control to deck him and attack the monster intelligently, with her gun. As Carmilla later voices her fear of losing Grok, Killraven finally voices his fear of losing M'Shulla. Carmilla and M'Shulla sit out *AA* #28 and 29 in an old airplane with Grok. She tells M'Shulla that Grok was cloned from a dead man and almost tells him who Grok is, but Killraven unknowingly interrupts.

Carmilla dreams of the possibilities of allowing herself weakness, but realizes that both the dream and her current nightmare are forms of the same lie in *AA* #31. In this issue, she actually gets to kiss M'Shulla. That physical tenderness so softens her that she compliments Killraven on his gentler feelings toward Volcana Ash and the damage the two of them did to the Martians by destroying Death-Birth. She also confesses to having lost her sense of direction, a statement that has both physical and metaphysical implications.

In the dreamdome in Nashville, Tennessee, Carmilla sees Gork dead and in a coffin. She later makes a Volcana Ash style approach to M'Shulla, but later still, rebuffs him slightly by telling him that he is not the center of everything. After hearing the manner of death of Hawk's father, she comments that we are never free of our families.

"A Death in the Family," *AA* #34, brings an end to Hawk and Grok. In it we are told who Grok was and what was his relationship to Carmilla. Carmilla's father was a scientist specializing in clone research when the Martians came again. To protect his daughter, he agreed to work for them, but was crushed to death when he rebelled. Carmilla was forced to use the skills taught to her by her father to try to clone him, but used a defective cell that produced Grok (so named because the word held hope for her). She meditates aloud that it is a child's dream to be the creator of its parent. For her, that dream became a horror in the form of Grok.

AA #35 is Carmilla's story, yet it is almost a let down following the previous issue's revelations. Emmanual, the twenty-four-hour man, chooses her as the mother of the monster G'rath's son so that his entire species, consisting of himself and G'rath, may continue in the genetic memory of G'rath's son. Carmilla shows pity for Emmanual and G'rath even while fighting them. She shows her continued growth in this story as she allows the empathy bound up in her feelings toward Grok to expand beyond herself and M'Shulla.

At a Martian nursery near Atlanta, Carmilla nearly attacks Killraven to prevent his slaughter of the Martian birthlings. Answering his angry questioning, she makes her strongest argument against unthinking violence by saying that immediately before the battle is the best time to discuss philosophies; that to kill the defenseless birthlings would put the Freemen on the same level as the Martians who feasted on human babies at Birth-Death. Her arguments are rendered moot as the Freemen's escape cracks the birthlings' immunization chambers. Carmilla plays almost no part in *AA* #37-39,

displaying only a sarcasm that has mellowed to a wry humor and a continuing love for M'Shulla that Killraven no longer sees as threatening.

Whatever the original plans for the character of Carmilla Frost were, Don McGregor made her Killraven's philosophical foil. Carmilla's desire for non-violent solutions, and her insistance on thought and planning, continually conflict with Killraven's need for direct action. In counterpoint, Killraven's excellence in direct action several times saves Carmilla's live. By the time Killraven/War of the Worlds stops, the two of them are approaching a philosophical meeting place. Unfortunately, we never learn what happens at that meeting.

Laboratory Project 6-LXM-QWS (Nomenclature: **MINT JULEP**) was conceived in a test tube and raised in a laboratory. The genetic material from a euglena mixed with her own at conception gave her a light green skin, dark green eyes, and white hair. By the age of sixteen, this exotic young woman had escaped and formed her band of Freewomen, which harrassed the Martians in the Washington, D.C. area in much the same manner that Killraven and his Freemen did in the New York City environs.

Killraven meets Mint Julep as she spies on Carmilla and M'Shulla. To his chagrin, the meeting does not go his way as she first tosses him and then insures his attention with a kick in the head. She demonstrates her skills with her hand weapon, a starpiercer, by destroying M'Shulla's crossbow. Mint and her Freewomen join the Freemen to release Hawk and Old Skull from Abraxas; to free Killraven from Rattack and the High Overlord; in a New Year party; and in another escape from the High Overlord and Abraxas.

Mint Julep appeared only in *AA* #22-24. Her status as leader of the Freewomen made her Killraven's equal, but by *AA* #25 Killraven had moved on using dynagliders she provided. Why did they separate? Killraven, who, at that time, had not completely formulated his plans to set up groups of Freemen guerrillas, was driven to find his brother at Yellowstone, while Mint apparently would not leave Washington. More importantly, Killraven and Mint Julep were too much the same. If either had joined the other, one would have eventually had to challenge the other for leadership of the band. This would probably have had disasterous results for the band and for all post-invasion mankind. Nonetheless, Mint Julep was very popular with the readers, who kept asking for her return.

In **VOLCANA ASH** McGregor created the epitome of concept of the fire in women that can consume a man at the same time as he created a heroine with powers to rival those of Phoenix. Volcana was fire personified. Her red hair was always moving, as though stirred by a hot wind. Her clothing was all of fire colors. Her bare feet seemed unaffected by Chicago's winter snow and ice; rather, they caused the ground to steam where she walked. She aroused an equal, if different, heat in Killraven.

Volcana Ash received her abilities after she and her sister, Melonie, were captured during the invasion. While Melonie was taken to Birth-Death to become one of the Eves, Volcana was given to the experimental scientists. Her nervous system was altered until she could tap the fusion fires of the stars, releasing great amounts of heat at will. Although she prefers to use her hands to direct the energy discharge, any part of her body will do as she demonstrates when she incinerates a crucible guardian who tries to strangle her. She can release enough heat

Killraven
Ladies
BMcCall '79

to melt a Martian banquet hall or control her output precisely enough to burn the robot head of a flying hunter from Killraven's neck without doing more to him than cauterizing the wound.

Volcana had stayed in the Chicago area hoping to free her sister, but afraid of harming her if she tried. When Killraven offers to destroy Birth-Death, she aids him most effectively. Her triumph fades whe she thinks that she sees Melonie among the freed Eves. The Eve does not recognize Volcana; does not even remember her own name.

We never learn if Volcana's amorous invitations to Killraven in *AA* #27-29 and 31 are accepted or not. She leaves the Freemen in #31 to search among the Eves in hopes of finding her sister. Both Volcana and Killraven regret the parting.

What do you do the morning after the morning after **MOURNING PREY**? You stop, and think, and contemplate this woman-shaped enigma wrapped in her own silk and covered with butterfly scales.

As they search for an unknown seer, Killraven and the Freemen enter the Okeefenokee Swamp. There they attack a nest of giant caterpillars and are attacked in turn by hordes of butterflies at the command of Mourning Prey who's offspring grubs and fliers both are. After considerable searching, and much philosophizing about the nature of his struggle, Killraven and M'Shulla rejoin Carmilla, Old Skull and – Mourning Prey.

Who and what is Mourning Prey? Carmilla Frost wonders at her physical antecedents; butterfly woman, mother to caterpillars. "Interim I: Creation" and "Interim II: Metamorphosis" show us some of her mind and more of her soul. However, it is her wordless communications with Killraven's mind during the two days in the swamp and, most importantly, in "Interim III: Flight," that show us most about her. Bound to the swamp, she must ever produce ugly caterpillars in ugliness. Caterpillars change, become beautiful butterflies, and leave. This is the pattern, unalterable, that traps Mourning Prey more than the physical existance of the swamp. She knows this, but refuses to admit it to herself.

The why of Mourning Prey? Perhaps her struggle in ugliness to bring forth beauty that flies as soon as it is created is a metaphor for Killraven's struggle; as the swamp stands for the world in which he fights, the butterflies may be the people he fights to free, and in freeing, will lose. We will never know, for the story ends here in the last issue, #39, of *Amazing Adventures.*

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CLUB NEWS by Nick Chinn

Steve and I would like to express our personal thanks to the following persons who made the combined mailing of *THS* #17, *THS/UK* #2 and *THS/AP* #2 possible: Phil & Grace Sharples, Denis McFarling, Cat Yronwode, Jerry Lenz, Lela Dowling, Lea Sapp, Jerry Perkins and Martin Lock. We know they'll appreciate your thanks if you get a chance to write them.

The U.S. Postal Snail apparently struck again when *TA* #9 was mailed out on April 28: we had reports out of Pennsylvania that the issue arrived as late as June 4 . . . 3rd class mail usually takes only (?) 2 weeks!

The "Gale Allen" strip reprinted in *TA* #9 was reproduced from photostats of the original art provided by Jerry Sinkovec . . . our thanks to Jerry. Also in our files is original art to a Tiger Girl story from *Jungle Comics* #154, and a Camilla story from *Jungle Comics* #23. The artwork doesn't quite stack up to Fran Hopper's work on "Gale Allen," but the positive response we've received indicates that you would like to see more of this kind of material. We are assuming of course that we won't get our socks sued off for using the art (which is impossible since we already put our socks into hock to get this issue out).

More projects: we are presently working on *THS/AP* #3 already (85% settled). Full-color covers and centerfold have already been printed and the interior will have an additional 2 pages of color. Artists included so far: Brent Anderson, Terry Austin, Joe Chiodo, Frank Cirocco, Lela Dowling, Rudi Franke, Al Gordon, Steve Swenston and Gary Winnick.

As if that weren't enough: we're also working on a reprint of Lela's *THS/AP* #2, with at least 10 new peices (2 in color), *plus* a new color centerfold. We plan to send this new edition to all our subscribers, but if you *don't* want it (at 33% off of the $3 cover price), please let us know soon after you get this issue.

To supplement our sagging income and over-extended finances, we've been selling custom-matted back covers of *THS/UK* #2 (Lela's centauress) at conventions. The prints are hand-signed by Lela with a unicorn pen sketch. We are now offering these by mail at $4.00 each postpaid. CHFC subscribers with sufficient balances can get a print by requesting a deduction from their account . . . just let us know. We also have signed & numbered (1 - 100) matted prints by Frank Cirocco and Joe Chiodo at $6.00 and $8.00 respectively, postpaid. You can buy these color prints sight unseen or wait until they appear in *THS/AP* #3.

Answers Department: for those who have been guessing the identities of the Golden Age jungle heroines on Trina Robbin's *THS* #17 cover, you can check the key on page 30 of this issue to see how many you recognized.

The motley crew in the accompanying picture was the CHFC delegation to the 1979 San Diego Comic Con, prior to departure: Brent Anderson, Steve Johnson and Lela Dowling (Brent is the one pawing the ground once for each installment of "Saddle Tales" he has drawn . . . he just may have been at it too long . . .).

Missing Subscribers Department: (once again) . . . at least our list isn't growing, but we still haven't found the following people we owe money: R. Michael Griswold (Houston, TX); Jerald Magid (Los Angeles, CA); Wes Smith (Paw Paw, MI); and John Wentworth (Alhambra, CA). Our thanks to those of you who do keep us current on your changes of address.

A PARADOX OF PATRIOTISM

by Deby Dunn

What's black and white and red all over? (And it's not a newspaper.)

Let me give you a hint: She was the second heroine to be created especially for comicdom's craziest non-team, the Defenders. Steve Gerber was her creator. Got it?

That's right – the Red Guardian. The Red Guardian? One of the few Marvel heroines to gain my complete respect even though neither her powers nor her costume were very exciting. Why was I so excited, then, you may ask? Because of her dauntless personality, that's why. But I'll deal with that later.

The Red Guardian made her debut in *Defenders* #35, an issue that acted as a sort of breather after three issues or so of frantic activity – including a lot of brain-switching among Nighthawk, Jack Norriss, "Bambi" the fawn and Chondu the Mystic. The Red Guardian in her civilian identity is really Dr. Tania Belinsky, a Soviet citizen and the world's greatest neurosurgeon. She is called in from the U.S.S.R. for the purpose of putting Nighthawk's brain back into his body. This she does, assisted by Dr. Strange.

However, she does not just do her surgical stuff and split for the Soviet Union. She wishes to see more of the world outside Russia, but is hampered by her constantly attending bodyguard. Learning of her desire to extend her visit in the U.S., Dr. Strange kindly "persuades" a few people that she should be allowed this liberty. Dr. Belinsky is rather surprised at her countrymen's sudden change of heart, but she gladly takes up residence as Dr. Strange's houseguest at his Sanctum Sanctorum; after that, one thing led to another, and the Red Guardian remained with the Defenders for ten issues straight.

Although the Red Guardian had no visible powers other than agility and fighting skill, she never backed down from a fight. Truth to tell, in some of the confrontations they were soon to find themselves in, the Defenders might have done very poorly, had it not been for the Red Guardian's added skill. The Red Guardian also never went down without a fight, except once or twice, and even then she always got right back up again. While the Red Guardian wasn't afraid to express admiration for the powers of others – notably for Dr. Strange's – she was never over-surprised; she was also never afraid to admit her own shortcomings, whether these were being vulnerable to the Red Rajah's "persuasion" or merely being tired after carrying a man twice her weight up three flights of stairs. Throughout her stay with the Defenders she was an admirable, consistent, well-conceived character. Steve Gerber deserves much credit for his handling of her.

Like the goddess Athena, the Red Guardian seemed to be born whole, right out of Gerber's head. Mature, professional, knowing her powers thoroughly, the Red Guardian swung into action without any sort of introduction. Her origins are still shrouded in mystery. We

know that she had no connection with the first, male, Red Guardian, who was supposed to be to his country what Captain America is to the United States, but who died in action after a very brief career. Tania took up superheroing for reasons entirely her own: She wanted to do more for her country than she could as a plain neurosurgeon. Yet, the Soviet state frowned on her vigilante tactics and the police actively hunted her. The paradox of her love for her country, with her corresponding belief that there are still a few bugs to be worked out of the system, and that country's great disapproval of her, was not one she pretended to have resolved.

Well and good – we know why she became the Red Guardian. But how she did it, where she got her costume and did her training, has so far never been revealed. Since her regretable transformation by Codename: Sergei/The Presence seems to be more or less permanent, the world may never know how she did it. But I'll deal with Codename: Sergei in a few minutes.

Although the Red Guardian's prowess in battle was always more than satisfactory, it was her ideological conflicts with certain other members of the team that made her stay in *Defenders* truly memorable.

Regardless of the fact that as the Red Guardian Tania acted as an independent individual, at heart she was a communist, a socialist, and very idealistic. Thus, she had a hard time accepting Nighthawk as a rich capitalist and Power Man as a cynical superhero. Hearing Power Man explain that he won't stay with the Defenders unless he gets paid, because if he doesn't get paid he doesn't eat, Tania bursts out, "You expect renumeration for aiding your fellow man?! I am revolted!" and is snotty to Power Man for the next two issues. For the next three or four issues of *Defenders* there was a debate between Power Man and the Red Guardian over whether greed or idealism ran the world. In the end, Cage and Belinsky agreed to disagree and despite their early antagonism they became fast friends.

Defenders #40 was the Red Guardian's big spotlight. The Defenders had just returned to Dr. Strange's Sanctum Sanctorum, there to celebrate the Valkyries's release from prison, when a rock with a message tied to it came crashing through the front window. The note read: "How can you call yourselves Americans when you harbor a *Communist* in your home?" Angered, the Red Guardian went out after the note-throwers alone, in order to make amends for her presence causing the attack in the first place.

Soon she found herself facing a nameless masked man who appeared monstrously strong. He stated his intent to use Tania as a hostage in order to gain free emigration for Russian Jews. She refused to take this lying down, however, and a furious fight follows between the

fleet Red Guardian and her steam roller-like attacker. In the end, the Red Guardian tricks her would-be captor into leaping face first into the side of a building, and wins the day; but not until she has a few choice words for him about terrorism and its resemblance to the tyranny and oppression it claims to oppose.

Finally the party had to end. Someone in the Soviet Union became so nervous over Dr. Belinsky's continued vacation in the United States that they resorted to blackmail to get her to return to Russia. In *Defenders* #44 she received a threatening phone call from the Soviet Embassy demanding that she return to her homeland or risk her mother's death. Although angry that she should be so threatened, Tania did leave the Defenders (in *Defenders* #46) with regrets on all sides, and flew off to Moscow, where she arrived in *Defenders* #49 and was met by a man whom she assumed to be a KGB agent. Little did she know that her faulty assumption was to cost her nothing less than her humanity.

In *Defenders* #51 Tania learned that she had fallen into the hands, not of the KGB, but of a mysterious person known as Codename: Sergei. This person is apparently so dangerous that the KGB pretends not to know about him, and so powerful that Leonid Brezhnev quakes at his every word. After a brief fight for her freedom, the Red Guardian was subdued by a will-nullifying device sewn into a cloak Sergei's goons threw over her head. Her own mind submerged beneath what was apparently the amplified broadcast of Sergei's ego, she was meekly led to face her captor.

Oddly enough, instead of gloating over his newly zombied captive, Codename: Sergei, also known as The Presence because of his overpowering (artificially amplified) personality, goes into rapture and describes to her how he " . . . studied you from afar, spied on you, (knew) of your secret identity as the Red Guardian and admired you as a patriot – even as I disdained your misspent idealism." Having disclosed his great love for her, which she can do nothing but return, Sergei goes on to unveil his master plan: Sergei himself is dying of an incurable disease, and he feels that Tania's idealism is also something like an incurable disease, so Sergei has decided that the two of them shall undergo a nuclear transformation together, become beings of pure nuclear energy possessed of godlike power, and leave all bodily infirmities behind them forever. Then, presumably, they shall live forever – the greatest lovers the world has ever known.

At this point, let me stop and say a few words about the Presence. Marvel is known for its particularly vivid creations in the way of villains. But of all Marvel's villainous personalities, The Presence has got to be the most egotistical ever created. Its not that Sergei is truly evil – like all the best of Marvel's villains, Sergei is capable of great love – he's just heedless of others. Sergei goes about his secret projects without once thinking about all the hundreds of thousands of people who may die horribly if he makes a careless mistake. It's as if all those people don't even exist. And so, the reader that followed The Presence's career in the *Defenders* came to hate him, not for his evil, but for the magnitude of his callousness.

In the end, however, Sergei had his way; he and Tania were transformed into beings of living nuclear energy in an explosion that tore half of Europe apart and left the other half too contaminated to support life (there's that callousness I was telling you about). Tania remained under his control, a worshipful Juliet to Sergei's Romeo, until the Defenders showed up again. With Namor of Atlantis, the Defenders had come to this section of the world to seek the source of radioactive emissions that were contaminating Atlantean food supplies. Having survived the initial explosion by the skin of their teeth, the Defenders – Nighthawk, the Hulk, Hellcat and Namor – drag themselves ashore, only to find themselves confronting the trans-

formed Presence and Red Guardian. Sergei decided to kill the Defenders to demonstrate his power, and he almost does it, but at the last moment the Red Guardian, having been saved from death by the Hellcat's selfless action, breaks Sergei's mental control, remembers who she is and who her real friends are. She confronts The Presence with the fact that despite his harsh words for Tania's idealism he has been living on dreams himself — dreams of ambition for power, and the dream of a Tania Belinsky who never existed except in his dreams. Finally Sergei sees that Tania, the real Tania, is far more beautiful as she is than anyone he could dre dream up for himself, and the power he thought had made him invincible in reality is capable of doing no real miracles, but only of killing; so he leaves, sadder but hopefully wiser.

After this nothing is seen of The Presence or the Red Guardian (except for a brief scene in *Defenders* #59, where we learn that her "condition" is incurable) for about ten issues. Then, in *Defenders* #63, we suddenly see Sergei again, wandering with seeming aimlessness into a desolate area called the Forbidden Zone. There he finds one of his earlier creations, a giant amoeba that lives on radioactive emissions. In trying to destroy this monster, Sergei is eaten by it (*Defenders* #64).

Therefore, in *Defenders* #65, the worried Soviet government calls in the Red Guardian to see what Sergei is up to. Prior to this time, we soon learn, the Red Guardian has been living in a tiny radiation-proof house provided for her by the Soviets. There she sits, musing on her past love of action and getting lonelier by the minute. Having nothing better to do, and fearing that in his despair over losing her Sergei may do something drastic, Tania sets out to find him at once.

Once in the Forbidden Zone, she is not long in discovering that Sergei has been eaten by the amoeba; at the same time, the readers learn that Sergei himself considers this a fitting punishment for having created the thing in the first place, and has resigned himself to death. However, seeing the Red Guardian flying around outside the amoeba gives him new hope. When the hungry amoeba gobbles up the unsuspecting Red Guardian, it is more than The Presence can bear; and eventually by combining their nuclear powers, they manage to blast it to

(continued on page 31)

BATWOMAN R.I.P.?

You know, it's sometimes ridiculous, the extent to which you get to feel involved with the "lives" of comic characters . . . I've just been re-reading *Detective* #485 wherein Batwoman gets bumped off by the League of Assassins, and I must admit to being . . . well, disturbed.

For one thing, it's the unexpected *nature* of her demise; a far cry from the usual comic book "death" (blasted into "another dimension" and back in six issues), she's stabbed in the belly and bleeds to death, which is a hell of a mess and undignified way to go . . . besides being painful, of course.

Not that it seems to worry Batman a lot, which is the second unpleasant aspect of this story; oh, he vows revenge, sure, but so what? He's done *that* much for total *strangers* in the past . . . considering that this is a woman he once came close to admitting he loved, I would have expected just a little sorrow. And since it was his under-estimation of a foe who indirectly *caused* her death, a trace of guilt or self-doubt might have been in order. But no . . . after all, Kathy Kane's murder was basically just a cheap trick to launch Batman into action. One can almost see O'Neil plotting the story; "Now, lessee . . . what can I do for a springboard to get Bats into yet *another* re-match with the boring old League of Assassins? Oh, yeah . . . I'll kill off Batwoman and have him swear revenge . . . after all, who's gonna miss *her*?"

Well, *I* will.

Oh, you could argue that she was a silly character, but that doesn't mean potential couldn't have been *developed;* for example, Spider-Woman, a real bozo of a concept was, prior to her recent "big change," being quite well-written and was one of Marvel's better books.

People have regarded Batwoman as "femme" or "cutesy," but I'd point out that she saved Batman *almost* as often as he saved her, which for a heroine of the unliberated fifties, wasn't bad going; and I, for one, thought her cosmetic weapons were appealing and distinctive . . . no, I thought Batwoman had a lot going for her, and I resent her being killed when such bland, boring characters as Vicki Vale, the original Bat-Girl, and, indeed, the *present* Batgirl, are still around.

Conversely, I wouldn't want her brought back at this stage in the proceedings . . . well, you want somebody in comics to stay dead, for a change . . . and considering the nature of her murder and the "realistic" type of story in which it was presented, a miraculous resurrection would be somewhat out of place.

So what's the *point* of this monologue, you ask? I'm honestly not sure there *is* one, except that the Batwoman is remembered with affection by quite a few people, and I didn't think her death should go entirely unnoted.

And I did want to ask one question . . . Isn't it ridiculous, the way you sometimes get to feel involved with the "lives" of comic characters?

— **Howard W. Stangroom**

MARY MARVEL

"The Riddles of Death" - *11 pgs. (with Bulletgirl)*
Mary Marvel #8 - *Dec. 1946*

Golden Age Girls

by Steve Johnson

It is graduation day for Mary Batson and she is graduating with highest honors. And who should come to congratulate Mary but Susan Kent, better known in criminal circles as . . . Bulletgirl! Mary's step-mother offers the girls a ride home but they decide to walk and to do a little visiting. Little do the girls know that two villainous figures secretly spy on them from hiding. They are Dr. Riddle and the Weeper!

Dr. Riddle casts down a rope from the second-story window and the deadly noose slips around Susan Kent's neck. Susan has no chance to change to Bulletgirl and fight back. A quickly spoken "Shazam!" from Mary Batson and magic lightning brings the Shazam Girl – Mary Marvel!

Mary finds Susan hanging by her neck and facing a double death – by the noose and the knife. Mary routs the villains, but they escape as she lowers Susan to the floor. Susan Kent now changes to mighty Bulletgirl but the girls have lost the getaway trail. However, the vain, egotistical madman, Dr. Riddle, has left one of his riddle clues daggered into a nearby post: "Squirrels hide nuts in hollow trees! But where do people hide them?"

After following a false lead to the City Asylum, the girls go on to an abandoned asylum outside town. Mary Marvel changes back to innocent Mary Batson to check the grounds while Bulletgirl goes inside the building. Bulletgirl quickly finds and subdues Dr. Riddle, but the Weeper, who had been waiting in hiding, slips up from behind and captures her in a straightjacket.

Meanwhile, Mary is suspicious of the long delay. She creeps in to find Bulletgirl caught. But before she can say "Shazam!" she receives a mouthful of water from a hose in the hands of the Weeper. Bound and gagged, Mary and Bulletgirl are left in an airtight room to suffocate.

Fortunately Bulletgirl is able to hook her pointed gravity-helmet under Mary's gag and pull it away. Mary yells "Shazam!" and once more a lightning flash brings Mary Marvel. The World's Mightiest Girl easily bursts from the prison. A quick search shows that Dr. Riddle and the Weeper are gone but that there is another note daggered to a wall: "Just in case you escape – which is almost impossible - unriddle this if you can! Birds of a feather *don't* stick together. And birds without feathers can fly in the sky! A bird in the bush is worth two in the hand when gold eagles come floating down in the land."

After a bit of joint brain-storming, Mary finds Dr. Riddle hijacking a planeful of gold and parachuting it to

Costume: Red with yellow trim and Shazam bolt; white cape with yellow trim; yellow, flat-soled boots
Hair/eyes: Brown/black

the Weeper who is waiting in the forest below. Mary saves the damaged plane as Bulletgirl arrives to capture the Weeper. Unfortunately the descending Dr. Riddle lands on top of Bulletgirl. But, before the villains can escape with the gold, Mary returns to the scene and knocks out Dr. Riddle. Bulletgirl revives in time to join the showdown fight and kayos the Weeper. The heroines exchange "goodbyes" and Bulletgirl hauls the crooks off to jail.

Later, as Mary Batson reads the headlines of the final edition newspaper, "Two Flying Girls Nab Crooks," she reflects on the great team Mary Marvel and Bulletgirl made, and wonders if they'll have another adventure together someday.

As Fawcett's only two superheroines it would have seemed natural to have Mary Marvel and Bulletgirl team-up again. But 32 years past before they got into action together again (*World's Finest* #255).

Mary (Marvel) Batson was the twin-sister of Billy (Captain Marvel) Batson with the same powers. Susan (Bulletgirl) Kent was the girlfriend of Jim (Bulletman) Barr, a lab technician who perfected a super-human serum and flying, anti-bullet, "gravity" helmets.

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"The World's Mightiest Girl" appeared in:

Captain Marvel Adventures #18,19,37,43,65 (Dec. 1942 - Sep. 1946)
w/ Marvel Family #18; w/ Captain Marvel #19,37,43,65; origin #18
cover app. #18; cover app. only #19

Gift #4 (1949)

Justice League of America #136,137 (Nov., Dec. 1976)
w/ JLA #136,137; cover app. #137

Limited Collectors Edition #58 (1978)
w/ Captain Marvel, Superman & Supergirl; cover app.

Marvel Family #1-89 (Dec. 1945 - Jan. 1954)
w/ Marvel Family #1-89; 3 stories #11,44,48,52,56,59; 2 stories #1,5,10,12,14,62-71, 73-78,80-83,86-89; also solo #2-10,13-35,37-39,41-43, 45-47,49-51,53-55,57,58,60
cover app. #1-87

Mary Marvel #1-28 (Dec. 1945 - Sep. 1948)
w/ Bulletgirl #8; 5 stories #6,10; 4 stories #1-5,7,9; 3 stories #8,11-14,18-28; 2 stories #15-17; cover app. #1-28

Master #118 (Oct. 1950)

Shazam! #1,3,6-8,10-17,19,20,22,23,26,28,30,35 (Feb. 1973 - May-June 1978)
w/ Marvel Family #1,11,14,17,20,26,38,30,35; rpts. #3,6,7,8,12-16,23
#8 reprint Captain Marvel Adventures #18 (origin)
solo #10,13,16,19; rpts. #8,12,14,15,17,22
cover app. #3,8,12,13,14,20,23,35

Super-Team Family #6 (Sep. 1976)
rpt. Marvel Family #89

World's Finest #253-256,261,263 (Oct.-Nov. 1978 - Feb.-Mar. 1979)
w/ Marvel Family #253; w/ Captain Marvel, Bulletman & Bulletgirl #255;
w/ Captain Marvel #254,256,263; solo #261

Wow #9-58 (Jan. 1943 - Sep. 1947)
w/ Mr. Scarlet & Pinky #9; cover app. #9-58

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Steven R. Johnson, P.O. Box 1329, Campbell, CA 95008

ME-OW.

TAYLOR &
NANCO
THE
BLACK
CAT

FOX'S FOXES &

Long before the official advent of the media-dubbed Women's Lib movement, the cinema testified to the changing roles of women in progressive society. Probably the most outstanding impetus for portraying such changes was WWII, when women increased in importance both in regard to pulling their own weight (Katharine Hepburn in *Woman of the Year*) and in fulfilling romantic dreams (Ingrid Bergman in *Casablanca*.) Hepburn personified a woman capable of doing a man's job, but rather uncertain with men; Bergman was less independent, but more capable of evoking passion.

Superhero comics, of course, took almost 20 years to articulate these archetypes – and when comics did reach this level of characterization, only

two scripters had the versatility to utilize those elements, Gardner Fox and Stan Lee. Each drew heavily from other sources and collaborators, yet still possessed enough innate storytelling ability to transform the superhero format in terms of plot, characterization, and occasionally even thematic depth. This is not to say that no important changes were wrought by contemporaries such as Broome, Kanigher, Thomas, and Goodwin – but Fox and Lee are of special interest because they represent what I term "artistic craftsmen," writers whose whole approach is formulaic but whose fecundity of concepts suggest the creative artist (other examples might be Robert E. Howard, Sax Rohmer, or Arthur Conan Doyle.) This fecundity showed itself in the dazzling diversity of abilities, antagonists, and apocalypotic dooms that Fox and Lee created for their heroes – so they could hardly neglect the heroines.

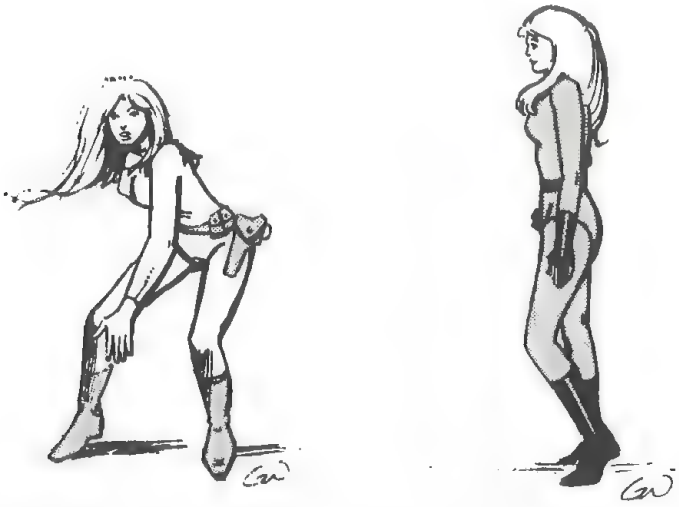
The typical Fox archetype is of the Hepburn mold. The single-character superhero magazines on which he worked were distinguished by the professional standing of their heroines – *Green Lantern*'s Carol Ferris, owner of an aircraft company; *Hawkman*'s Shiera Hall, both a police officer and archaeologist; *Flash*'s Iris West, a reporter (who, unlike Lois Lane, was not clever one minute and stupid the next); and *Atom*'s Jean Loring, a defense attorney. Only the non-superheroic *Adam Strange* strip lacked this feature, but nevertheless Alanna of Rann often made up for her non-professional standing by actively aiding her paramour in the combatting of alien menances. Of these ladies only two have super-powered identities, Carol (Star Sapphire) Ferris and Shiera (Hawkgirl) Hall. Other non-romantic heroines sometimes aided Flash and Atom in the rigors of superheroics; respectively, Doralla and Queen Maya. And only one character ever sustained a plotline in three of these features (*Hawkman* #4, *Atom* #19, and *Green Lantern* #42), plus *Justice League of*

LEE'S LEMANS

by GENE PHILLIPS

America (#51) – Zatanna. (The villain Dr. Light also appeared in as many books, but without a continuing plotline.) Competent females could also become villains fairly often – the Huntress in *Brave and Bold* #62; Brittis in *Adam Strange/Mystery in Space* #89; Queen Alvit in *Hawkman* #13; and in *Justice League of America,* Hyathis (#3), Superwoman (#29,30), Allura (#51), and Queen Zazzala (#23,60).

However, the primary heroines were, like Hepburn, so strong that their careers threatened to interfere with romance (as when Jean Loring would forestall her desired nuptials with Ray (Atom) Palmer in favor of furthering her practice). And just as Spencer Tracy would serenely remind Hepburn



that she was a woman as well as a worker, so did Fox's males take the lead in romance. At the end of one adventure, Hawkgirl is about to preen her feathers by telling Hawkman how she secretly saved him from Queen Alvit's mind-control device, thus proving her usefulness (*Hawkman* #13). Instead, Hawkman accidentally throws her a curve by confessing that he overcame the mind-control (he believes) because of his ardent love for her – which he demonstrates, while she perceptively keeps quiet.

Stan Lee, however, subscribed to the dewy-eyed Bergman school of heroines. Unless the heroine was allied to some fantasy-structure, as *Captain America*'s Sharon Carter was part of S.H.I.E.L.D. or *Sub-Mariner*'s Dorma was part of Atlantis' peerage, then the highest profession she might aspire to was nurse (*Thor*'s Jane Foster) or secretary (*Daredevil*'s Karen Page, and *Iron Man*'s Pepper Potts). Lee utilized more regular superheroines than did Fox (who used only Hawkgirl and the JLA's Wonder Woman), but Fox's Wonder Woman always held her own with the male Leaguers, while Marvel Girl, the Wasp, the Scarlet Witch, and the Invisible Girl often collapsed from the strain. (The Invisible Girl really had two personas – Lee's demure picture of femininity, who complained peevishly about superheroics ruining her life, and Kirby's adventurous one, who deliberately confronted Dr. Doom to prove herself in single combat in *Fantastic Four* #17). Marvel's villainesses did not wear well – one would have thought that, with three super-teams, Lee would create more than Fox (who created most of his she-devils for the JLA), because the nature of a team book did not necessitate a physical battle with the opponent, as did most single-character books. But Lee kept reforming his lethal ladies – the Black Widow (*Tales of Suspense–Iron Man/Avengers*), the Scarlet Witch (*X-Men/Avengers*), Medusa (*Fantastic Four/Inhumans*), and, at one point, the

Norn Queen – leaving only one outstanding unrepentant, the Enchantress (*Thor/Avengers*). This tendency to reform emphasized the Bergmanesque emotionality of the heroines, forever casting woeful look of love at the stoic heroes. Like the Berman persona, each heroine had courage enough to help the heroes when possible, even if it was no more than Betty Brant pulling the plug on a Spider-Slayer robot (*Amazing Spider-Man* #25). But they were basically weak as opposed to Fox's strong characters, and they, not the eternally-reserved heroes, made most of the romantic overtures, though never in an agressive way. An interesting parallel to the aforementioned Hawkman example is the one in *Captain America* #114 in which Sharon Carter helps Cap and Rick Jones defeat a monstrous robot, only to be told by her lover that he cannot "bear" the thought of her being endangered by her work, and that he will break off their romance if she does not quit S.H.I.E.L.D. She refuses (though not indignantly, nor permanently), and he leaves with scarcely a word.

Of the two, Fox's position is probably the more mature, but it was less influential than Lee's, because Fox did not emphasize the female archetype seen in *Woman of the Year.* The greater emotionality of Lee's heroines made the larger impression, leading to more mature characterizations (although there's certainly something to be said for the evocation of a single archetype, as Will Eisner personified the "dangerous woman"). In the late '60s, dropping sales and influx of new talent contributed to the virtual breakup of "house styles," yielding, among other things, more individualistic (if chaotic) treatments of women. Stever Gerber, for instance, portrayed innocents (Jennifer Kale in *Man-Thing*), clinging types (Kathryn Reynolds in *Son of Satan*), warrior-women (Valkyrie in *Defenders*), and exhibitionists (Beverly Switzler in *Howard the Duck*) with equal facility. Chris Claremont comes closest to articulating a single repeated archetype as did Fox and Lee, but even he offsets his crew of dynamic, ballsy women (Storm and Phoenix of the X-Men, and Ms. Marvel) with an atypical addition to the *X-Men* cast: the gentle Mariko Yashida.

Inevitably one must make the caveat that comics writers like Fox and Lee hardly had the semi-lofty cultural aspirations of *Woman of the Year* or *Casablanca,* but they did have a desire for consistent characterizations which was unknown in superhero comics before the '60s. In one sense such a synthesis impresses me more than the stronger but melodrama-rooted characterizations of EC and Lev-Gleason, since the Superhero writer is required to design his characters with both mythic and mundane characteristics. One interesting result of such a synthesis is that it inevitably requires a male writer to grant mythic aspects to the female, whereas for his own sex he need make no more effort than to appeal to the profusion of male archetypes in popular literature (such as those created by the aforementioned Howard, Doyle, and Rohmer). And though Lee can be credited with molding the mundane aspects of characterization (which are always the easiest), Gardner Fox is probably more responsible for the mythic aspects, by the consistent way his heroines and villainesses proved themselves equal to the requisite heroisms and villainies. One remembers Queen Zazzala's domination of the entire JLA *twice* (*Justice League of America* #23,60), Wonder Woman's inconclusive battle with the Martian Manhunter (*JLA* #8), and the co-starring role of Black Canary with Starman in *Brave and Bold* #61,62 (prior to acquiring makeshift super-powers) – beside all this, the accomplishments of Lee's females are rather tacky, except where influenced by Kirby (who was no small influence himself).

Fox and Lee made possible that mingling of mythic and mundane characteristics seen with good effect in *Avengers'* Mantis, *War of the Worlds'* Volcana Ash, *Master of Kung Fu*'s Leiko

(continued on pg. 32)

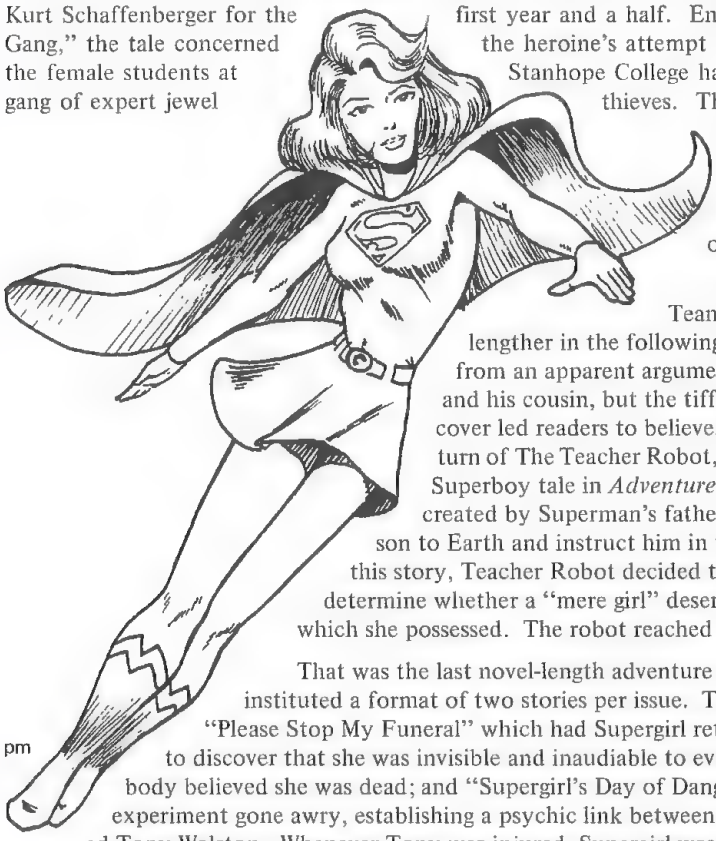
THE HEROINE REVUE

The Adventures of SUPERGIRL

by Scott Gibson

My last column focused on Supergirl's long-running series in Action Comics; *this one will concentrate on her appearances in* Adventure Comics. *To be sure, The Maid of Might appeared many times as a member of The Legion of Super-Heroes while they were the lead feature in this title and she even appeared once before The Legion moved into* Adventure *(as a guest star in the Superboy strip, November, 1960). However, time and space prevent me from examining those stories in this article. Rather, I will concentrate solely on the period during which Supergirl held the lead spot in* Adventure Comics.

As of #381 (June, 1969), Supergirl replaced The Legion of Super-Heroes in *Adventure.* A Neal Adams cover graced this first issue, a booklength story illustrated by Winslow Mortimer and written by Cary Bates. Mortimer would share the regular art chores on this book with Kurt Schaffenberger for the first year and a half. Entitled "The Supergirl Gang," the tale concerned the heroine's attempt to discover why several of the female students at Stanhope College had apparently become a gang of expert jewel thieves. This well-written and suspenseful story featured a last-minute surprise appearance by Batgirl. Supergirl's own series was off to a flying start.



Bates scripted "The Super-Team's Split-Up," another booklengther in the following issue. The title was drawn from an apparent argument between Superman and and his cousin, but the tiff was far less serious than the cover led readers to believe. The story featured the return of The Teacher Robot, a character not seen since the Superboy tale in *Adventure* #240. The robot had been created by Superman's father, Jor-El, to follow his young son to Earth and instruct him in the use of his powers. In this story, Teacher Robot decided to test The Maid of Might to determine whether a "mere girl" deserved the awesome powers which she possessed. The robot reached the obvious conclusion.

That was the last novel-length adventure for several months. #383 instituted a format of two stories per issue. The two in this issue were: "Please Stop My Funeral" which had Supergirl returning from a mission only to discover that she was invisible and inaudiable to everyone on Earth and everybody believed she was dead; and "Supergirl's Day of Danger," concerning a scientific experiment gone awry, establishing a psychic link between Kara and a young man named Tony Walston. Whenever Tony was injured, Supergirl was the one who felt the pain!

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"The Heroine Haters" in *Adventure* #384 took Supergirl to a planet where females were considered vastly inferior to males and heroic deeds performed by someone like Super*girl* were frowned on. But, surprise of surprises, she discovered that the world's idolized hero, Volar, was actually a woman who had adopted a male disguise to be accepted by the populace. Encouraged by Supergirl, Volar determined to reveal her true gender. The story ended before this was accomplished, but readers were left with the positive idea that, in time, her planet would come to accept Volar as she really was.

The cover of #385 was noteworthy for the fact that it was the first since Supergirl had become the solo feature in *Adventure Comics* which did not depict either Superman or Clark Kent. Apparently, the powers-that-be at DC had decided at long last that the heroine could support a book without the aid of her famous cousin! The lead tale was "Supergirl's Big Sister." It took almost no time at all for The Maid of Steel to unmask her elder "sibling" Kranna as a phony who was trying to dupe Kara into making her rich.

#386's "The Beast That Loved Supergirl" actually owed its plot to a couple of old Lois Lane stories wherein a huge, ugly monster decided that he loved the girl reporter. Precisely the same thing happened to Supergirl here. An other-world monster created havoc and mayhem in his attempts to woo her. The issue's back-up story also owed its plot to something else; titled "The Godmother of Steel," it was – you guessed it – a retelling of the Cinderella story with our heroine assuming the fairy godmother role to a gal who looked exactly like Linda Danvers (at times, it seems like half of the women in the world must be exact duplicates of either Linda or Kara!).

A curious and disconcerting policy was initiated in the next issue and continued on a semi-regular basis for some time thereafter – #387 contained one complete adventure and the first half of another tale which was concluded in the following month's issue. "Why didn't the editor simply take the two-parter and make it into one booklength story?" readers asked. Mort Weisinger explained in the letter column some months later that he and his staff were working under a tight deadline and therefore had to "break-up stories over two issues."

Longtime Supergirl fans were reintroduced to The Maid of Might's pal, Lena Thorul-Colby. The years had brought changes to Luthor's younger sister. Happily settled into married life, Lena now had a young son about five years of age, named Val. Val had acquired psycho-kinetic powers from a strange space jewel which Luthor had sent him anonymously. The story itself was rather a poor one: Luthor, who had vowed never to let Lena know that he was her brother, suddenly determined to kidnap Val and raise him to become a criminal genius. If he didn't want to break Lena's heart by letting her know that she had a wicked brother, how did he think she would react to having an evil son? Fortunately, the question was academic, as Supergirl eventually recaptured Lex and returned Val to his parents. Val subsequently lost his special powers, as well. All this took place in *Adventure Comics* #387-388.

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Another old Superman villain, Brainiac, reappeared in #388 and #389 with a good-looking rogue named Kimor, endowed with the power to make all women – even super-powered one – fall in love with him. Despite their well-laid plans, the pair were defeated by Supergirl.

#390 was an all-reprint, giant-sized issue. #391 gave us "Linda Danvers, Super-Star!" A film director came to Stanhope to make a movie about Supergirl. He decided to screen test students for the lead part, and Linda Danvers won the role! Throughout filming, she was plagued by a series of

"accidents" which turned out to be the work of a revenge-crazed publicist. Eventually, Linda declined the part and the real Supergirl stepped in, donating her salary to charity, of course. The issue's second story involved yet another Linda lookalike who turned out to be a wicked emissary from another planet who hoped to leave Supergirl stranded on a distant world. "Supergirl's Lost Costume" in *Adventure* #392 put forth the unlikely notion that an entire college would indulge in a day of hero-worship. Stanhope held a Supergirl Day in honor of the many things which Supergirl had done for the college. At one point, all female students (except Linda) turned up wearing imitation Supergirl outfits. And one of the college instructors actually chided Linda for not wearing one also, as though students have nothing better to do with their time than play drooling fans to a celebrity! Stanhope did a complete turnaround, however, in the next issue's "The Unwanted Supergirl!" In that tale, all of the students and faculty hated The Maid of Might! But it turned out that Mr. Mxyzptlk was behind it all.

Streaky the Super-Cat joined his mistress in #394's "The Mysterious Motr of Doov," a retelling of The Wizard of Oz in space opera-style.

Readers were subjected to another bit of hero-worship fluff in *Adventure* #395's "The Rejected Supergirl," wherein Superman's cousin was in tears because a poll conducted on campus placed Supergirl as the ninth most-admired woman in the world (she thought she should have come in first!). Far more interesting was the back-up tale, "The Heroine in the Haunted House," which had Kara attempting to discover the reason behind a series of mysterious events in an old mansion near Stanhope. The story was concluded in *Adventure* #396.

Big changes were in store for both *Adventure Comics* and Supergirl. Mike Sekowsky assumed editorship of the book beginning with #397. He also handled the artwork and scripting chores. His first move was to give Supergirl a brand-new costume, one designed by readers, in a stroy which guest-starred another heroine under Sekowsky's editorship - Diana Prince, the non-super-powered Wonder Woman. Also on hand was the villainess-turned-heroine, Morgana the Witch (see my column in *The Heroines Showcase* #13 for more details!). It is important to note that The Girl of Steel's only indestructible uniform was ripped to shreds by magic in this story, and for sometime thereafter, she wore strictly Earth-made garments.

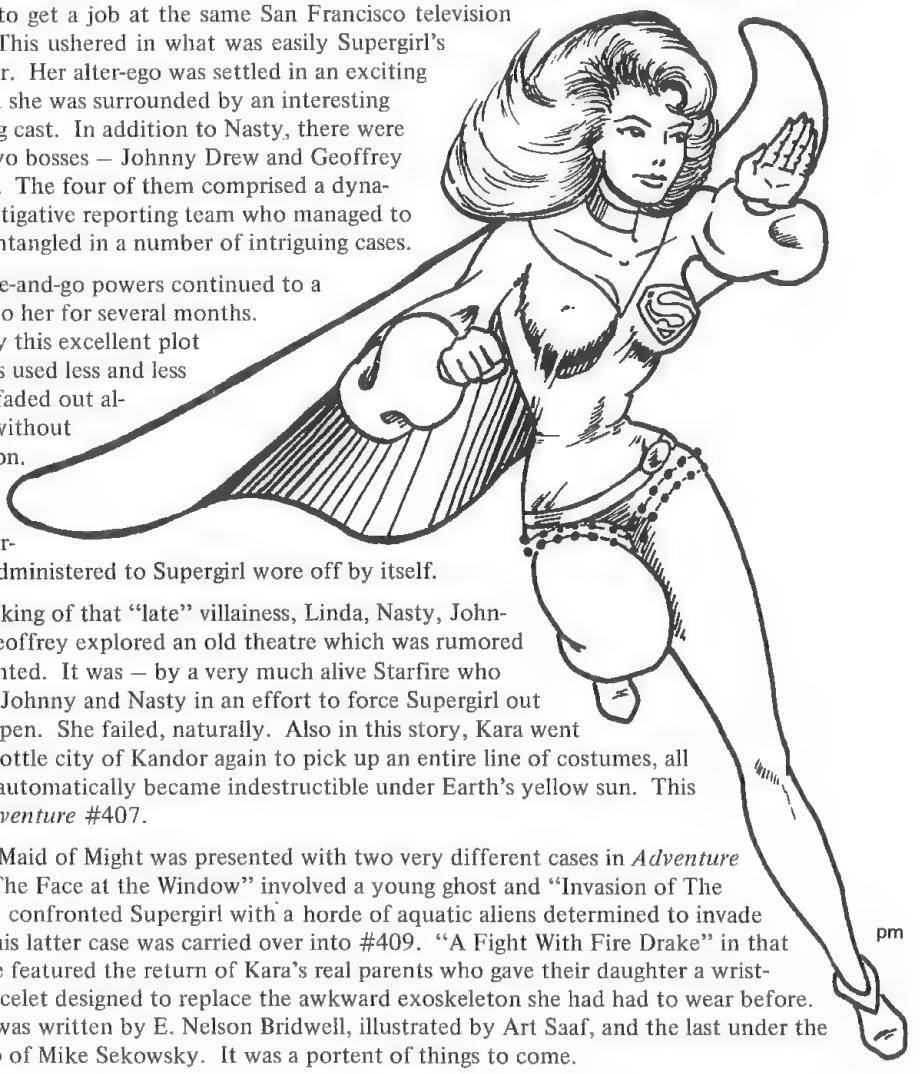
The second story in #397, a mere 8 pager, introduced a character who would become a regular thorn in Supergirl's side for many issues to come. This was Nasthalthia – Nasty, for short – niece of Lex Luthor. In this tale, Lex and Nasty plotted to destory Kara. A mysterious older woman hovered in the background during their scheming, but she never said a word. Was she supposed to be Luthor's sister? That was the implication, but the woman was certainly too old to be Lena Colby. Yet earlier stories had established the fact that Lex had no other siblings. So where did Nasthalthia come from? Sekowsky later offered a lame explanation that Luthor had an older sister, Nasty's mother, who had lived for years in Europe. At any rate, Nasty proved to be a delightful, if wicked, character. In this story, she was an out-and-out villainess. Later she mellowed somewhat, never returning to criminal tendancies, but remaining a pain in Linda/Supergirl's neck.

Adventure #398 reprinted an old Supergirl tale from *Action* and featured just a short new story; it was little more than a vignette called "Catcher in the Sky" in which our heroine came up against a couple of giant aliens. It was actually more in a humorous vein than a dramatic one. "Johnny Dee – Hero/Bum!" in #399 brought Kara into the world of college football and organized crime. #400 ushered back one of Supergirl's finest old antagonists – Black Flame! Unfortunately, the plot did not do her justice. She captured The Daughter of Krypton early on; thereafter she simply inflicted torment and torture upon Supergirl until at

last our heroine found a way to escape and overcome her captor. *Adventure* #401 was another disappointment – Linda Danvers dreamed the whole story, which involved Luthor and Nasthalthia once more.

A multi-issue caper began in #402 and continued through #405 (not counting #403, another giant-sized reprint issue). Supergirl was faced with a fantastic new villainess named Starfire (a beautiful woman who wore a jeweled patch over one eye) who, aided by a wicked scientist, had developed a serum designed to take away super-powers. She planned to use it on *all* super-heroes, starting with Supergirl. She administered the dosage and – it worked! Sort of . . . The Maid of Might's powers began to desert her and return at unpredictable intervals. The story finally ended with Starfire's apparent demise, but no cure could be found for Supergirl's condition. So Kara journeyed to the bottle city of Kandor where she was equipped with an exoskeleton which gave her added strength when her natural powers deserted her. Thereafter, Supergirl began wearing a wide variety of costumes, many designed to hide the exoskeleton – and the truth of her come-and-go-powers – from the world.

But the biggest change of all in Supergirl's and Linda's lives came in #406. Linda graduated from Stanhope and took a job as a reporter-on-the-go at TV Station K-SFTV in San Francisco. Unfortunately, and unbeknownst to Ms. Danvers, Nasthalthia began to suspect that Linda and Supergirl were one and the same. In the hopes of proving her suspicions, Nasty managed to get a job at the same San Francisco television station! This ushered in what was easily Supergirl's finest hour. Her alter-ego was settled in an exciting career and she was surrounded by an interesting supporting cast. In addition to Nasty, there were Linda's two bosses – Johnny Drew and Geoffrey Anderson. The four of them comprised a dynamite investigative reporting team who managed to become entangled in a number of intriguing cases.



Come-and-go powers continued to a vexation to her for several months. Eventually this excellent plot device was used less and less and then faded out altogether without explanation. Evidently the serum which Starfire had administered to Supergirl wore off by itself.

Speaking of that "late" villainess, Linda, Nasty, Johnny and Geoffrey explored an old theatre which was rumored to be haunted. It was – by a very much alive Starfire who abducted Johnny and Nasty in an effort to force Supergirl out into the open. She failed, naturally. Also in this story, Kara went into the bottle city of Kandor again to pick up an entire line of costumes, all of which automatically became indestructible under Earth's yellow sun. This was in *Adventure* #407.

The Maid of Might was presented with two very different cases in *Adventure* #408. "The Face at the Window" involved a young ghost and "Invasion of The Mer-Men" confronted Supergirl with a horde of aquatic aliens determined to invade Earth. This latter case was carried over into #409. "A Fight With Fire Drake" in that same issue featured the return of Kara's real parents who gave their daughter a wristwatch bracelet designed to replace the awkward exoskeleton she had had to wear before. This tale was written by E. Nelson Bridwell, illustrated by Art Saaf, and the last under the editorship of Mike Sekowsky. It was a portent of things to come.

With the next issue, Joe Orlando assumed the editorial reins. The two tales therein were illustrated by Bob Oskner and written by John Albano, the team who would work on The Maid of Might's strip throughout most of her remaining stay in *Adventure Comics*. One of the stories in this issue involved Supergirl with a young tyke from another world named Judy, who was part of a scheme to destroy all super-heroes on Earth. Judy was little more than an innocent pawn, and after her wicked step-father was destroyed, the child moved in with Linda Danvers.

#411 featured another "misunderstood-alien-who-isn't really-wicked" type of tale. Although Linda's co-workers were still on hand in nearly every issue, they all began to assume distinctly minor roles in Supergirl's life. This was disappointing, since the heroine and her supporting cast meshed better and had the potential for becoming involved in unique situations.

#412 was a booklength feature illustrated by Art Saaf, but inked by Supergirl regular Bob Oksner. Saaf frequently stepped in to handle the pencils on this strip while Oksner always backed him up as inker. The story, "The Battle for Survival!" took The Maid of Might to a faraway planet which she was required to free from the grip of tyranny. Beginning with *Adventure* #413, Supergirl started sharing the book with a number of rotating back-up features, including Zatanna, The Black Canary and The Vigilante. This issue's "The Walking Bombs" involved a twisted genius who had devised a number of unstoppable robots which he used to loot banks. #414 was one of those rare issues to give Supergirl another costumed villain. This issue's was Vortex, a revenge-obsessed man who had devised a machine which could create tornados, waterspouts and other windstorms. Vortex evidently perished at tale's end, and has not been revived in any stories to date. A second tale in this book saw Linda's little friend and roomie Judy (from #410, and who had not been seen or mentioned since that first issue!) returned to the care of her grandparents, thus freeing Supergirl from additional responsibilities and potential future plotting problems.

In #415, The Daughter of Krypton was abducted by a space pirate who had fallen in love with Linda Danvers. Ironically, he had no idea that Linda was, in actuality, Supergirl he simply thought that Ms. Danvers was a ravishing creature. Needless to say, he was rudely surprised to learn just what a power-house he had kidnapped!

#416 was a hundred-page reprint book devoted to DC's super-heroines. The book is worthy of comment in itself, and I will not attempt to summarize it here, since it bears no relationship to this column's main topic.

"All Men Are But Slaves" in #417 provided readers with a look at Linda's co-worker Johnny Drew's family, notably his father and sister. Magic incantations had drawn Johnny and his father into another dimension where men were kept solely as slaves by women. Supergirl followed them there and managed to free them with some help from that world's benevolent queen. Although the queen agreed to let Supergirl return to Earth with Johnny and his father, she would not permit the men of her own world to be freed, because it was contrary to the law. The Maid of Might, always respectful of the ways and cultures of others, did not try to violate this law. It was an excellent story, scripted by Steve Skeates.

Ace detective Jonny Double guest-starred in next issue's "The Face of the Dragon!" He had been hired by Nasthalthia who had told him that Linda Danvers was trying to kill her. Actually, of course, she hoped that he would be able to prove that Linda was really Supergirl. Jonny did not fall for Nasty's ploy, but did become involved with Linda in solving a series of crimes perpetrated by The Batman's old foe Dr. Tzin-Tzin. Len Wein wrote this one.

#419 marked the return of a small-time cad named Mike Merrick who had first been seen in *Adventure* #410. He had escaped Supergirl's clutches there, but returned in "The Thief Who Loved Supergirl" with a girlfriend who turned out to be a real live witch and who was bent on driving The Maid of Might insane. Mike decided he loved Supergirl and could not see her destroyed, so he deliberately destroyed both himself and his girlfriend Lorelei in a car crash. A similar ploy was used by a trio of evil aliens in #420's "And Death Shall Have No Dominion." Calling themselves "The Mind Warp," the three attempted to turn Kara into a super-killing machine. Had the son of one of these aliens not betrayed them by revealing all to Supergirl, their plot might've succeeded.

(continued on page 32)

Dear Steve,

Thanks for the latest CHFC bundle – an excellent read!

The highpoint of *THS* #17 has to be Cat's remarkable examination of Leiko Wu. Certainly it is a long time since I have gained such pleasure from an article which put forward such intelligent views in so skilled a style. *MoKF* has long been my favorite comic despite the infurating fill-ins.

The artwork is all excellent and compliments the articles nicely (a very rare thing in the small press world).

THS/UK #2 was also very interesting. I was very surprised to learn of a British heroine called "Spitfire" – I wonder which comic she appeared in? I must confess that I don't find Spitfire a very exciting character – the cancellation of *Invaders* was no loss to me.

The Purdey piece seemed too short and superficial. Surely there is more to be said about this character.

I hadn't realized that there were so few British comic book heroines – indeed the only one that I can think of, apart from those mentioned by Ruan, is the costumed cousin of Billy the Cat from the Bearo some years ago.

I agree with Scott Gibson about Spider-Woman's progress from the original "bleah" idea. However I would take him to task about her not having changed directions – I can think of at least three such changes.

Kathleen's remarkable minutes of a meeting was one of the best things that she has published for years and was certainly the most successful item in the zine although it was rivalled by the Battle of the Sexes thing. This kind of long meaty article should be encouraged.

All in all an excellent publication although some of the art seemed a little weak, possibly by way of a contrast to Lela's magnificent covers. Which brings me to the pièce de résistance – the *Portfolio*. I am quite overwhelmed by this – what more can I say?

Theo Clarke
3, Wilson Street
Highfields, Leicester
England LE2 0BB

I certainly agree that there is more to be said about Purdey, but we couldn't find anyone to say it when we where putting the book together. So, Paul gratiously pinch-hit for us.

And since you're short on words about THS/AP *#2, we'll glean a few comments from some other letters. –SRJ*

Glory, old fellow, you have done all we fans a great service by producing her portfolio. Thanks for sending me a copy. It is beautifully done. A fine tribute to a *rare* talent with *great* potential.

Lela is on her way to becoming one of the outstanding poets of fantasy material. She is more a poet than anything. And she is a *she*. How wonderful that we have her to give us those images of incomparable *she*-ness. **– Frank Thorne**

Loved Lela Dowling's art in *THS/AP* #2. The presentation and artistry was among the best I have seen. **– Rudye M. Meador**

I particularly enjoyed the *Art Portfolio* which spotlights Lela Dowling's drawings. I would like to see more publications of this approach. **– Marvin Mann**

Loved *The Heroines Showcase Art Portfolio* #2 featuring Lela Dowling. **– Neil A. Simmons**

Tell that pixie who draws those pretty monocerci and pegasi that I liked the *Art Portfolio*. **– David J. Alway**

Lela is indeed a "special" woman and her art is truly delicate and gentle and very majestic. **– Roger Schoolcraft**

Visually, Lela has attained that nebulous something called *style*. **– Steven Souza**

Dear Steven,

Thank you very much for *THS* #17 and the other materials. I very much enjoyed the portfolio by Lela also. #17 was a fine issue, excellent in fact. The only thing I could ask for is more work by Carol Strickland and

Mercy Van Vlack. I know both of these artists are very busy, but anything you could do to encourage them would be most appreciated.

Arnie Starkey
3306 So. 10th
Tacoma, WA 98405

My sentiments exactly! More work by Mercy and Strick! And I think that I've used every trick up my sleeve to try and get it. But if you'll settle for the full page Batwoman piece by Mercy in this issue, maybe your letter will help encourage more material from them for our next issue. –SRJ

I been waiting for a reply for you on my last letter there was none so I guess you didn't get it (or bother to write).

Well when is your next issue to come out I've been waiting you guys are slow (to put it mildly). If its hasn't come out yet then send me the first ones that you come out with starting with 1.

If you can't do that then send me my money back our paper always needs donations that would be a good one.

If you don't have time to waste on me neither do I have I the time to waste on you.

Glenn Lemonds
637 N. Cherokee Rd.
Social Circle, GA 30279

The above is transcribed verbatim from a poorly scrawled, pencilled note on binder paper. It was received shortly after TA *#9 was mailed. Fortunately we don't get many like it, but it takes a number of nice letters like the following two to make up for it. –SRJ*

Dear Steve,

Enclosed is my check for a membership in the CHFC and drawings of Tigra and Jana of the Jungle, a couple of the heroines I've worked on professionally. Hope you can use the illos.

Will Meugniot
415 S. Alexandria, #10
Los Angeles, CA 90020

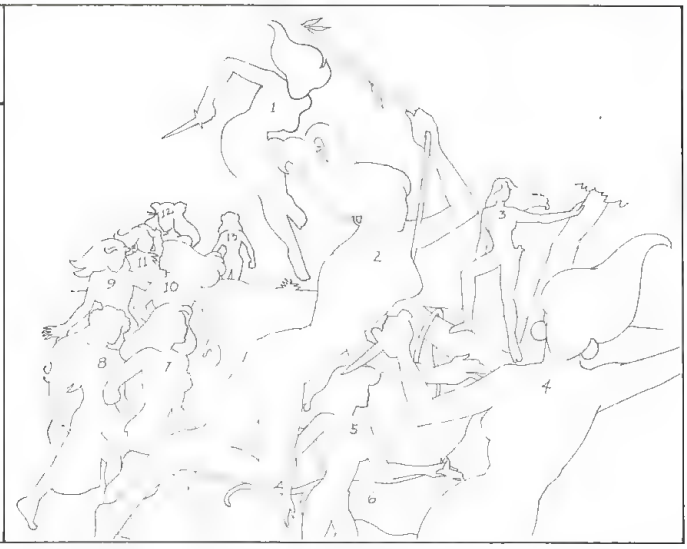
Can I use the illos?! Oh boy . . . Well I'll slip Jana onto this page, and I know I'll have a number of rabid Tigra fans hounding my p.o. box until that illo gets printed. –SRJ

Dear Nick & Steve,

I am sending you a check to renew my sub-

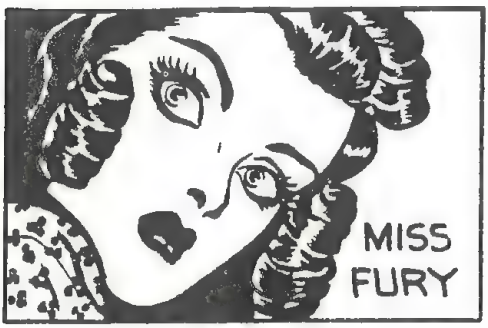
Cover Key to
The Heroines Showcase #17

1. Camilla
2. Tiger Girl
3. Princess Pantha
4. Sheena
5. Rulah
6. Saber, Rulah's panther
7. Cave Girl
8. South Sea Girl
9. Taanda
10. Jann of the Jungle
11. Lorna
12. Panthea
13. Kazanda of the Lost Continent



scription. I just want you also to know that I enjoy your club very much and I also wish I had started long before I did. I love to read your books. Thanks alot.

Mary Niles
1425 South C Terrace
Lake Worth, FL 33460



Steve:

About *THS* #17: tell Ms. Robbins that Dale Messick drew Brenda Starr tales in the old Fox and Superior books. Tell *me* something. Did Tarpe Mills actually contribute to the issue? If she did, I, for one, demand you get someone to interview her.

Chuck Alligood
107 Rabbit Run
Oxford, NC 27565

Copies of the Tarpe Mills illos were supplied to us through Trina. Reduced and colored versions of these illos graced the splash page of each issue of Miss Fury. *Part of Trina's reason for doing the article was to convince Tarpe of her sincere interest in Tarpe's work which hopefully would lead to a meeting and also an interview. –SRJ*

Dear Steve,

I like the cover of *TA* #9; it tells a tale by itself and tells it well. I also like Alex Bialy's Eunice as well as his Ixiona. He does nice clean work. Swenston's Ixiona is interesting.

The "Gale Allen" reprint was fascinating. I've never seen any part of her story before. It's interesting to see that costumes really haven't improved in that time. Fran Hopper's quite an artist.

"The Conjuring" is gorgeous! I laughed all the way down the hall from the mailbox after I read it. More Swenston/Gordon please!

Scott Gibson did rather a good job on Shamrock & Pixie. There has been definite improvement in that story line as time has passed. Is there more coming?

Then there's my own story. What can I say? I promise to try to do better next time. Chapter two is written, but I'll have to tear it apart and re-write it. Rudi Franke's art is excellent. I particularly like his interpretation of Gray, the visitor, and the crosstime trip.

Gerald Perkins
Det. 5, AFSCF(87)
APO San Francisco,
CA 96334

Dear Steve,

Needless to say, I enjoyed seeing Shamrock & Pixie in *TA* #9. Scott did a fine job with the characters and story, though I was surprised to see such crude illos, some of which also did not match the descriptive content of

the story. I presume that Larry did not see (or failed to read) a copy of the story text before doing the pencils of the illos.

The cover and other illos for the new Ixiona story were terrific. I can't bring myself to read the story itself though because my interest in centaurs and such characters is absolutely nil.

"The Visitor" was well written, and the heroine is an appealing one. I for one, however, hope that if the series continues it will eventually feature some good old-fashion "action." Or is Perkins one of those who are strictly into the "sophisticated" psychological and allegorical stuff?

Al Turner (aka Al Tanner)
P.O. Box 506
Sheffield, AL 35660

Always nice to hear from our Editor Emeritus (even when I have to twist his arm for some sort of comment). –SRJ

WOMEN OF THE WAR OF THE WORLDS *(cont. from pg. 8)*

These then are the four women of Killraven's War of the Worlds:
Carmilla Frost – Philosophical, haunted, sarcastic, and loving
Mint Julep – Cool, quick, and dangerous
Volcana Ash – Incendiary, amorous, and loyal sister
Mourning Prey – Beautiful enigma

Enjoy them, admire them, you will never see a quartet like them again.

– Gerald Perkins

A PARADOX *(cont. from pg. 12)*

atoms, and that is the end of the monster. After that, Sergei and Tania remain together in the Forbidden Zone, where their atomic emissions cannot hurt anyone else.

Now there are those who protest that the Red Guardian is unlikely to just set up housekeeping with anyone who meddled in her life the way Sergei did. Normally, I would be foremost among them. However, after I had considered Tania's changed circumstances, I saw that there was more to it than a tacked-on happy ending.

It had been stated in what passed as the Red Guardian's origin (*Defenders* #55) that the major goal of Tania's life had always been to help others. This is a fine goal. Now, even though she had been transformed by Sergei, she still wants to help others. Unfortunately, the only thing left for her to do to help others is to stay away from them.

It should also be considered that The Presence himself has changed considerably from the totally self-centered person who first captured and enzombied the Red Guardian. The final confrontation between them had forced him to see that although he had made himself very powerful, he was still a very small human being. Having killed the giant monster he helped to create, Sergei tells Tania something significant about himself: "Once, years ago, I stood on this same hilltop. I boasted that I would fill the emptiness inside me – and I sought to do so by establishing dominion over others. My ambition was power! I succeeded only in poisoning the very soil itself!"

Do my ears deceive me, or has Sergei grown up? I think he had grown up and found out that he is a person no better or worse than anyone else. Tania has nothing more to fear

from him. She accepts his love and companionship. What else can she do – prove herself more of a child than Sergei was? After all, she herself was pining away for loneliness in her guarded lead house. Who else can give her the companionship she needs without dying for it?

There is nothing wrong with the ending to the Tania and Sergei love story. Instead, I think it says something important about what it means to be human – or more than human.□

FOX'S FOXES & LEE'S LEMANS

(cont. from pg. 22)

Wu (the Moench-Gulacy version), *Son of Satan*'s Saripha Thames, *X-Men*'s Storm – the irony being that the best are at Marvel, which was in the '60s more conservative in its choice of female images, whereas DC experimented a bit more with types like Tina of the Metal Men and Elasti-Girl of the Doom Patrol. As of 1980, Marvel is not producing any female characters comparable to those listed above (though Marv Wolfman's Black Cat came close, and could've been an outstanding characterization), and DC seems only to produce imitations of Marvel's syntheses – Dawnstar of the *Legion of Super-Heroes* as a Storm-copy, for instance. Both have seemingly decided – as did Marvel for a time during the late, pre-*Conan* '60s – that the appearance of characterization is all that is necessary to sell books, and so the short prevalence of the "artistic craftsman" is brought to an end - or perhaps merely a temporary impasse, such as occured in the American films of the late '60s and early '70s. There, too, one sees a dearth of feminine roles and of such "artistically crafted" films as *Woman of the Year* and *Casablanca* – that is, films that were neither high art (*2001*) nor banal melodrama (*The Sting*). Perhaps women will have to again assume cultural importance – as they did during the early '40s and mid-'70s – before we can see further outbreaks of creativity in comics or anywhere else.□

THE HEROINE REVUE *(cont. from pg. 27)*

Mike Sekowsky returned to illustrate #421's "Demon Spawn," a Wolfman-Skeates adventure which gave our heroine another exciting antagonist. This one was a silver-haired sword-and sorcery type villainess named Nightflame. Nightflame had a bone to pick with Supergirl, because Kara's goodness was somehow "eating away" at Innerverse, the world which the villainess called home. She hoped to wrest Supergirl's powers from her and use them to restore Innerverse's wicked atmosphere.

More aliens arrived to wreak havoc on Earth in #422's cleverly-written "Pawn of Peace!" Although The Girl of Steel circumvented their plans, the tale's end saw the aliens, disguised as Earthmen, setting up operations anew somewhere in Russia and gloating that their day of victory would yet come . . .

Supergirl managed to save the entire Justice League from domination by yet another cluster of outer space baddies in #423. And #424, Supergirl's last appearance in *Adventure Comics,* saw Linda vying with Nasthalthia for a promotion at the television station. Nasty accidentally caused the death of a camera man and something snapped in Linda. She stormed into the office one morning and handed in her resignation. She slammed out of the building leaving a bewildered Geoff, Johnny and Nasty behind. "Where will you go now? Where now, Maid of Might?" the story's closing caption asked. The answer was, of course, into her own book and then later into the pages of *Superman Family.* But all of that is a tale for some future column. Supergirl's run in *Adventure Comics* had come to an untimely end. Never has our heroine ever regained the glory, the height of scripting, characterization or supporting cast which she achieved here. Neither Nasty nor any of Linda's other co-workers has subsequently been seen. Supergirl has remained pretty much of a loner since this time, drifting first back into college and then into a much less-satisfying (at least, for the readers!) job. None of the wonderful villains she acquired while in *Adventure* have reappeared, either. Sad to say, Supergirl appears to be a character whose heyday has come and gone. But her blaze of glory was great while it lasted. The stories in *Adventure Comics* #397 through #424 remained among my all time favorite pieces of comics literature.□

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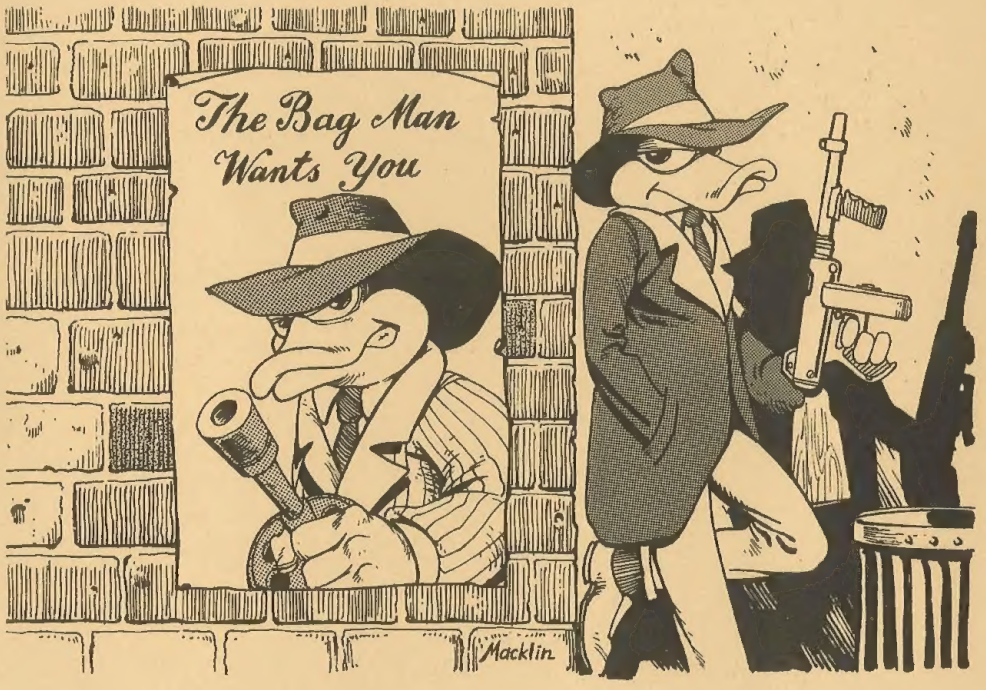

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